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AND THE
YORKSHIRE SCHOOLS

CUMBERLAND CLARK.

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CHARLES DICKENS
AND THE
YORKSHIRE SCHOOLS

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WITH HIS LETTER TO

MRS. HALL

BY

CUMBERLAND CLARK

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CHARLES DICKENS AND THE YORKSHIRE SCHOOLS

A FEW NOTES ON AN AUTOGRAPH LETTER, AND THE IDENTITY OF WACKFORD SQUEERS OF DOTHEBOYS HALL WITH WILLIAM SHAW OF BOWES ACADEMY

CHARLES DICKENS, the most popular and perhaps the greatest of English Novelists, was also somewhat of a Reformer, and if his fame as a writer of fiction did not obscure to some extent his work in other directions, he would rank worthily with Wilberforce, Howard, and other great philanthropists for his splendid efforts towards the social amelioration of the people, and especially the younger generation. Many of his books were

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"novels with a purpose," and one of his grandest crusades was that one against the iniquitous YORKSHIRE SCHOOLS which is found in the earlier chapters of "Nicholas Nickleby"; few of his characters are better remembered than the villainous WACKFORD SQUEERS, and few more powerful chapters can be found than those dealing with the miseries and atrocities of "Dotheboys Hall"; chapters which did more to put an end to the wicked system than a score of Acts of Parliament could have done.

It has always been a subject of keen discussion as to whether Dickens drew the character of Wackford Squeers from a real individual or not, and the question has been ably argued from either side ever since the book first appeared; the balance of opinion inclined to the belief that while, in the words of Dickens' own preface, "Mr. Squeers is the representative of a class, and not of an individual," and therefore is a composite creation, he must have had some foundation in fact, and a likely enough prototype was discovered in the person of a Mr. William Shaw, who was brought into unenviable notoriety through several actions for cruelty to his helpless charges, a few years before "Nicholas Nickleby" was written; but the con-

troversy did not appear likely to be settled satisfactorily either way.

Now, however, a remarkably interesting letter from Dickens, written whilst "Nickleby" was publishing, has come to light, which conclusively settles the question, and proves beyond a doubt that WACKFORD SQUEERS WAS DRAWN FROM WILLIAM SHAW. Probably Dickens exercised the usual author's licence, and adapted, altered, or touched up the portrait here and there, and he may have incorporated some characteristics of other schoolmasters he had met or heard of, but this important letter leaves us certain that the character of Squeers is largely and principally founded upon the actual personage Shaw, and the "Mystery of Wackford Squeers" is a mystery no longer.

The letter is addressed to Mrs. S. C. HALL, the well-known Irish novelist and writer, who is still remembered by her "Sketches of Irish Character," and other works from her own pen, besides for her collaboration with her husband in "Ireland, its Scenery, Character, etc.," and her work in the "Art Journal," which Samuel Carter Hall edited for a number of years. As a sidelight on Dickens, it is amusing to recall that this same S. C. Hall is popularly supposed to be the original of that not

very savoury creation, PECKSNIFF, who was a prominent character in the author's next novel, "Martin Chuzzlewit," and a cynic might make some caustic reflections when comparing this very cordial letter with another letter of Dickens' of 1853, in which, besides other uncomplimentary remarks on the Halls, he says: "I denounce that amiable couple as the most terrific humbugs known on earth at any period of history"!

But to return to our letter. It is written from Doughty Street (No. 48, his first London house, where he moved with his wife and child early in 1837, while "Pickwick" was in the height of its success), and is dated 29 December 1838 (just about half-way through the publication of "Nickleby"). The "interesting anecdote" referred to is unfortunately lost to us, but it seems highly probable that it referred to Squeers—or we should say Shaw—and it is not a very rash guess to opine that Mrs. Hall had sent Dickens some account of the devilments practised by this typical specimen of the Yorkshire schoolmasters; for he goes on to say that their rascalities "*cannot* be easily exaggerated, and I have kept down the strong truth and thrown as much comicality on it as I could, rather than disgust and weary the reader with its

fouler aspects. The identical scoundrel you speak of I saw—curiously enough. His name is Shaw; the action was tried (I believe) eight or ten years since, and if I am not much mistaken another action was brought against him by the parents of a miserable child, a cancer in whose head *he* opened with an inky penknife, and so caused his death." It may be noted here that the first action against Shaw was brought in October 1823, a little earlier than Dickens' "eight or ten years since"; there is an interesting entry in Dickens' diary (now preserved in the Forster Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum) dated 2 February 1838, during his journey to Yorkshire to collect material for the novel (which we must refer to more fully presently) where he notes, after having that day seen Shaw, that his case "must have been between 1823 and 26. Look this out in the newspapers." And as regards the "inky penknife" episode, another version (told by the Novelist himself) runs that Dickens, when a lad at school at Rochester, met this very boy, who had come from a Yorkshire school with a "suppurated abscess" which his master had treated in this horrible manner; so that perhaps the victim of this savage surgery did not die, or at any rate not at the moment. Such slight divergences in the

details of a story are only likely, however, after the lapse of a few years, especially when those years were so busy as our young novelist's.

Dickens goes on to tell of the snow-covered churchyard he wandered into, with the grave of an eighteen-year-old boy who had died "at that wretched place," and whose "ghost put Smike into my head upon the spot" (we will identify both the place and the boy presently); and then he explains in a most interesting passage how he went down into Yorkshire in an assumed name to make his enquiries, "taking a plausible letter to an old Yorkshire attorney from another attorney in town, telling him how a friend had been left a widow and wanted to place her boys at a Yorkshire School, in hope of thawing the frozen compassion of her relations." The description Dickens gives Mrs. Hall of his interview with the Yorkshire attorney and the latter's earnest warning against his own county's schools, is practically identical with the author's account of this same incident as he related it ten years later in one of his Prefaces to "Nickleby," where, as we shall presently see, he tells the story with more detail but to the same effect; the incident evidently made a great impression on him, which lasted for many years.

It will now be interesting to turn to Dickens' previously-published accounts of the Yorkshire Schools and their masters, which are contained in two Prefaces to "Nicholas Nickleby," one the original preface to the work, which appeared on its completion in October 1839, and the other written for the First Cheap Edition in May 1848; we need only concern ourselves with the passages dealing with the Squeers question, and will take first the "Preface to the First Edition."

It has afforded the Author great amusement and satisfaction, during the progress of this work, to learn from country friends and from a variety of ludicrous statements concerning himself in provincial newspapers, that more than one Yorkshire schoolmaster lays claim to being the original of Mr. Squeers. One worthy, he has reason to believe, has actually consulted authorities learned in the law, as to his having good grounds on which to rest an action for libel; another has meditated a journey to London, for the express purpose of committing an assault and battery upon his traducer; a third perfectly remembers being waited on last January twelvemonth by two gentlemen, one of whom held him in conversation while the other took his likeness; and, although Mr. Squeers has but one eye, and he has two, and the published sketch does not resemble him (whoever he may be) in any other respect, still he and all his friends and neighbours know at once for whom it is meant, because—the character is *so* like him.

While the Author cannot but feel the full force of the compliment thus conveyed to him, he ventures to suggest that these contentions may arise from the fact, that Mr. Squeers is the representative of a class, and not of an individual. Where imposture, ignorance, and brutal cupidity, are the stock in trade of a small body of men, and one is described by these characteristics, all his fellows will recognize something belonging to themselves, and each will have a misgiving that the portrait is his own.

To this general description, as to most others, there may be some exceptions; and although the Author neither saw nor heard of any in the course of an excursion which he made into Yorkshire, before he commenced these adventures, or before or since, it affords him much more pleasure to assume their existence than to doubt it. He has dwelt thus long upon this point, because his object in calling public attention to the system would be very imperfectly fulfilled, if he did not state now in his own person, emphatically and earnestly, that Mr. Squeers and his school are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible—that there are upon record trials at law in which damages have been sought as a poor recompense for lasting agonies and disfigurements inflicted upon children by the treatment of the master in these places, involving such offensive and foul details of neglect, cruelty, and disease, as no writer of fiction would have the boldness to imagine—and that, since he has been engaged upon these Adventures, he has received from private quarters far beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust, accounts of atrocities, in the perpetration of which upon neglected

or repudiated children these schools have been the main instruments, very far exceeding any that appear in these pages.

It will be seen from the above that the Author practically denies that there was any particular prototype of Squeers; the explanation of this may perhaps be found in the fact that when Dickens wrote, the keeping of these "Academies" was quite a flourishing trade in certain parts of Yorkshire, and the young Author was fighting "vested interests" of some power and importance; he tells us himself of contemplated actions for libel and of threats of personal violence made against him, and though we do not imagine that the latter threat would weigh much with a high-spirited youth filled with the knowledge of the righteousness of his cause, it may well be that a young and none too wealthy Author would hesitate about bringing himself within the reach of the law of libel; for Dickens knew the Law very well indeed, and his opinion of it is crystallized in Mr. Bumble's famous dictum that "the law is an Ass"; no one knew better than "Boz" how easily a man's career and fortune might be ruined by getting into the Law's entangling meshes, and he probably thought it wisest to disclaim any intention of placing any

particular person in the pillory. Dickens had had plenty of time to consider the criticisms showered upon him, and to weigh up the consequences of his attacks upon Squeers, Shaw and Co., for it must be remembered that "Nickleby" was published in monthly parts, and the Preface was issued with the concluding number, eighteen months after the Squeers chapters had seen the light. The Author's disclaimer has always been an awkward point for students of Dickens who felt convinced from various accumulated evidence that there was an actual original of Squeers, and we find an eminent Dickensian writing as late as 1895 that "Squeers is wholly imaginative," and that "Dickens did not sketch Squeers from Shaw" (Percy Fitzgerald in "Bozland"), but we venture to think that the evidence is now overwhelmingly in favour of an opposite verdict.

Ten years after the publication of "Nickleby" Dickens wrote a new preface, containing so much interesting information concerning the "Yorkshire Schools" that we must give in full the first two pages of the "Preface to the First Cheap Edition" (dated May 1848).

This story was begun within a few months after the publication of the completed Pickwick Papers. There

were, then, a good many cheap Yorkshire schools in existence. There are very few now.

Of the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, this class of schools long afforded a notable example. Although any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life, was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere; although preparation for the functions he undertook, was required in a surgeon who assisted to bring a boy into the world, or might one day assist, perhaps, to send him out of it, —in the chemist, the attorney, the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker,—the whole round of crafts and trades, the schoolmaster excepted; and although schoolmasters, as a race, were the blockheads and imposters that might naturally be expected to arise from such a state of things, and to flourish in it; these Yorkshire schoolmasters were the lowest and most rotten round in the whole ladder. Traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog; they formed the worthy corner-stone of a structure, which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-handed laissez-aller neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world.

We hear sometimes of an action for damages against the unqualified medical practitioner, who has deformed a broken limb in pretending to heal it. But, what about the hundreds of thousands of minds that have been deformed for ever by the incapable pettifoggers who have pretended to form them!

I make mention of the race, as of the Yorkshire schoolmasters, in the past tense. Though it has not yet finally disappeared, it is dwindling daily. A long day's work remains to be done about us in the way of education, Heaven knows! but great improvements and facilities towards the attainment of a good one, have been furnished, of late years, to those who can afford to pay for it.

I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places, near Rochester Castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes, and Sancho Panza; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time, and that they were, somehow or other, connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend, having ripped it open with an inky pen-knife. The impression made upon me, however made, never left me. I was always curious about them—fell, long afterwards, and at sundry times, into the way of hearing more about them—at last, having an audience resolved to write about them.

With that intent I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter-time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and was forewarned that those gentlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of the Pickwick Papers, I consulted with a professional friend here, who had a Yorkshire connection, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud. He gave me some letters of introduction, in the name, I think, of my travelling companion; they bore reference to a supposititious little boy who had been left with a widowed mother who didn't know what to do

with him; the poor lady had thought, as a means of thawing the tardy compassion of her relations in his behalf, of sending him to a Yorkshire school; I was the poor lady's friend, travelling that way; and if the recipient of the letter could inform me of a school in his neighbourhood, the writer would be very much obliged.

I went to several places in that part of the country where I understood these schools to be most plentifully sprinkled, and had no occasion to deliver a letter until I came to a certain town which shall be nameless. The person to whom it was addressed, was not at home; but he came down at night, through the snow, to the inn where I was staying. It was after dinner; and he needed little persuasion to sit down by the fire in a warm corner, and take his share of the wine that was on the table.

I am afraid he is dead now. I recollect he was a jovial, ruddy, broad-faced man; that we got acquainted directly; and that we talked on all kinds of subjects, except the school, which he showed a great anxiety to avoid. "Was there any large school near?" I asked him, in reference to the letter. "Oh yes," he said; "there was a pratty big 'un." "Was it a good one?" I asked. "Ey!" he said, "it was as good as anoother; that was a' a matther of opinion;" and fell to looking at the fire, staring round the room, and whistling a little. On my reverting to some other topic that we had been discussing he recovered immediately; but, though I tried him again and again, I never approached the question of the school, even if he were in the middle of a laugh, without observing that his countenance fell, and that he became uncomfortable. At last, when we had passed a couple of hours or so, very agreeably, he suddenly took up his hat, and leaning over the table and looking me full in the

ace, said, in a low voice: "Weel, Misther, we've been vary pleasant toogather, and ar'll spak' my moind tiv'ee. Dinnot let the weedur send her lattle boy to yan o' our school-measthers, while there 's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in. Ar wouldn't mak' ill words amang my neeburs, and ar speak tiv'ee quiet loike. But I'm dom'd if ar can gang to bed and not tellee, for weedur's sak', to keep the lattle boy from a' sike scoondrels while there 's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in!" Repeating these words with great heartiness, and with a solemnity on his jolly face that made it look twice as large as before, he shook hands and went away. I never saw him afterwards, but I sometimes imagine that I descry a faint reflection of him in John Browdie.

Dickens followed this with a reprint of most of the first Preface which we have just been reading. It will be noticed how he amplifies the story of the Yorkshire attorney which he briefly related to Mrs. Hall in 1838, and we may point out here that the London "professional friend" was Thomas Mitton, the friend of Dickens' boyhood, his companion during the Novelist's brief apprenticeship to the law, and later his confidential adviser and solicitor; while the Yorkshire lawyer is said to have been Thomas Todd of Frosterly; so here is another prototype discovered, that of John Browdie, while we are also given the pathetic original of (or

rather, suggestion for) the unhappy Smike. We consider that Dickens was a great Realist in one sense of the word, and his "fiction" is founded on "fact" to a remarkable extent. He was gifted with wonderful powers of observation, and a magnificent memory in which he stored for future reference all the thousand and one characters, scenes, and places which came into his very busy and varied life, more particularly his earlier journalistic years; as a result he seldom had to fall back upon sheer invention for a character, but could usually take down from its mental pigeonhole some real-life character and mould it to his requirements, for it is true that he frequently altered them a little to suit his purpose, and very often would blend several actual persons into one character; but we venture to say that there is hardly one amongst the multitude of his "dramatis personae" that was not derived, at least in part, from someone whom Dickens had met, marked, and mentally "filed for reference." It would be an interesting task for a Dickensian student some day to compile a complete "Key to the Characters Represented in the Novels of Charles Dickens"; but it ought to have been commenced while the great writer was alive and available for reference.

However, a vast number of prototypes have already been identified, and every year seems to see a few more discovered; undoubtedly this "actuality" which Dickens infused into his stories contributed largely to his wonderful popularity both then and now.

The visit to Yorkshire mentioned in the second preface (and previously referred to in this article) deserves a little further notice, as it is replete with interest, especially when we compare the details found in the biographies and letters of Dickens with the imaginary journey performed by Squeers and Nicholas in the novel.

This historic journey was made in January 1838 in company with his artist friend, Hablot K. Browne ("Phiz"), the illustrator of so many of Dickens' works, for the express purpose of gathering authentic material for "Nicholas Nickleby," for which he had just signed the agreement with Chapman and Hall, his publishers. The friends set off by the Glasgow mail-coach, travelling by way of Grantham, Newark, Retford, Doncaster, Wetherby, Boroughbridge, and Catterick, to Greta Bridge, where they stayed a night before proceeding to Barnard Castle (just over the Yorkshire border), the centre from which they intended to

pursue their investigations. In an amusing letter to his wife dated 1 February, Dickens described the journey to Greta, and it is curious to note how he worked into his novel any incidents which had struck him on the way; for instance, he wrote his wife that at Grantham he found "the very best inn I have ever put up at," and in the book we read how two passengers, "wisely availing themselves of their arrival at one of the best inns in England, turned in for the night at the George at Grantham." The "very fastidious lady" who pretended to be expecting her carriage and "made the guard solemnly promise to stop every green chariot he saw coming" was founded on "a most delicious lady's maid" described in Dickens' letter to his wife, "who implored us to keep a sharp look out at the coach window as she expected the carriage was coming to meet her," instead of which only a very dirty girl appeared; and the incident of a schoolmistress who showed Dickens a letter she was taking to one of her boys, wherein his father gave him a severe lecture, enforced with many texts of Scripture, on his refusal to eat boiled meat, was metamorphosed by the Author into the amusing story of Mobb's mother-in-law who "took to her bed on hearing that he would not eat fat." The

mention in the novel that Squeers and his party "were all put down together at the George and New Inn, Greta Bridge," is an instance of Dickens' trick of combining two localities or persons into one, for there are two distinct inns at Greta, "The George Inn," and "The New Inn"; he often did this intentionally, particularly in his London scenes, where he delighted to mislead his readers by transposing and mixing up his localities, thus giving the modern Dickens student an enjoyable task in identifying and running to earth the various old inns and houses described.

Dickens and Browne probably stayed at the King's Head Inn at Barnard Castle—an inn praised by Newman Noggs in the story for its "good ale"; tradition has it that he stayed some weeks there, writing part of "Nickleby," and the room he worked in and the very inkstand he used could be seen by the curious visitor; but as a matter of fact the travellers can have only remained there for a couple of nights at the most, as the whole journey was finished and Dickens back at work in London by 6 February. Barnard Castle was the centre of the nefarious profession which Dickens was about to expose; "all the schools are round about that place," as he wrote to Mrs. Dickens; and near by

is the little village of Bowes, once a Roman station, still boasting Roman remains and the ruins of an old castle, famous to some extent through being the subject of one of Turner's beautiful pictures, but now celebrated to all time as containing the original of "DOTHEBOYS HALL," the infamous "Academy" of Mr. Wackford Squeers. The remains of the particular building are still existing, and agree perfectly with the details described in the novel, and in the churchyard of Bowes Church ("the old church near the school" described in the letter) is the gravestone of "George Ashton Taylor, son of John Taylor, of Trowbridge, Wiltshire, who died suddenly at Mr. William Shaw's Academy, of this place, April 13th, 1822, aged 19 years"—the unhappy lad whose "ghost put Smike into my head, upon the spot."

Not a link now seems missing in the chain of evidence connecting Squeers with Shaw. By some happy freak of fate one of the actual Yorkshire Schoolmaster's business cards has been preserved to us, which reads as follows: "EDUCATION—by Mr. Shaw and Able Assistants, at Bowes Academy, near Greta Bridge, Yorkshire. Youth are carefully instructed in the English, Latin, and Greek Languages; Writing, Common and Decimal Arith-

metic; Book-keeping, Mensuration, Surveying, Geometry, Geography, and Navigation, with the most useful branches of the Mathematics; and are provided with Board, Clothes, and every necessary, at Twenty Guineas per annum each. No extra charges whatever, Doctor's bills excepted. No vacations, except by the Parents' desire. N.B. The French Language Two Guineas per Annum Extra." Then follows a list of addresses where further particulars and "most respectable References" may be obtained, while on the reverse of the card is a list of the clothes each boy is required to bring, and a footnote. "Mr. Shaw attends at the George and Blue Boar, High Holborn the three first weeks in the months of January and July"; this precious copy, however, has written across it, presumably in Shaw's own hand, "Mr. Shaw leaves Saracen's Head, Snow Hill, ½ past 6 o'clock, Thursday morning, 28 July"—the Saracen's Head, mark you, the very inn where we are introduced to Mr. Wackford Squeers! Shaw's card reads almost word for word with Squeers' advertisement, except for a few touches of travesty which Dickens inserted, such as "singlestick," "fortification and every other branch of classical literature," and the suggestive "razor" in the list of

the boys' outfit; both the advertisements include the ominous words "no vacations," it will be noted. The reminiscences that have been preserved of Shaw's school at Bowes fit in only too well with Dickens' description of Dotheboys Hall, and the disgusting details revealed in the action, "Jones versus Shaw," Court of Common Pleas, 30 October 1823, show that Dickens was well within the mark when he told Mrs. Hall that "the rascalities of those Yorkshire Schoolmasters *cannot* easily be exaggerated," and that he had truly "kept down the strong truth" and thrown as much comicality over it as he could. To quote from a contemporary newspaper, the above "was an action to recover damages of a Schoolmaster in Yorkshire on account of the injury done to the health of two sons of the plaintiff, one of whom was alleged to have lost his sight from the negligence of the defendant." It was tried before Judge Park, Mr. Sergeant Vaughan appearing for the father of the boys, Richard and William Jones; William, the blind one, gave the following evidence:

Witness will be twelve years old in January; could see as well as any person when he went to Mr. Shaw's school; he had small pox a year before, but it did not affect his eyes. The first week he was treated very well

he got toast and tea for breakfast, but they then turned him among the rest of the boys and gave him hasty pudding for breakfast; for dinner the boys had meat and potatoes on Sunday, and on other days bread and cheese; when any gentlemen came to see their children, Mr. Shaw used to come down and tell the boys who had not their jackets and trousers on to get under the table and hide themselves; the boys were frequently without a jacket or trousers; they washed in a large trough; there were only two towels for all the boys, which the big boys used to pre-occupy; their supper consisted of warm milk and water and bread, which was called tea; five boys generally slept in a bed; his brother and three boys slept with him; there were thirty beds in the room; in some beds there were only three or four boys; every morning the boys used to flea the beds for which purpose they were provided with quills by the ushers, and if they did not catch all the fleas they were beaten. On Sunday they had pot skimmings for tea, in which there was vermin; the ushers offered a penny for every maggot, but on their being found, the ushers would not pay them. About nine months after he had been to the school his sight was affected; he could not see to write his copy, and Mr. Shaw threatened to beat him; the next day he could not see at all, and Mr. Shaw sent him to the wash-house, as he had no doctor, and he would not have him in his room; there were eighteen boys there besides himself, of whom two were totally blind. In November, he was quite blind, and was then sent to a private room where there were nine other boys blind, a doctor was sent for, but he had no medical aid in the wash-house; the doctor (Benning) then discharged him, saying, "that he was blind of one eye, but could see with the other,"

this was what the doctor said, but he could not see through the other. Dr. Benning used to come to the school when the boys had nearly lost their sight. He merely looked at the boys' eyes and turned them off; he gave them no physic or eye-water or anything else. There was no difference in his fare during his illness, or his health. Mr. Shaw occasionally saw him, but gave him no assistance. The same number of boys slept in his bed during his illness as before.

Richard Jones corroborated the statement of his brother, adding, that he had the itch all the time he was there; twenty other boys laboured under the same disorder.

Two boys who had each lost one eye, and one quite blind were also examined. Benjamin Clatton described the mode of flea-hunting; there was a quill to each bed, which the several bed-fellows filled and emptied into the fire.

Mr. Tyrrell and Mr. Lawrence, two medical gentlemen, deposed that the cause of these boys' blindness was gross neglect.

Poor, miserable, little boys! how it makes one's blood boil to read even these bald outlines of their sufferings! And yet the defence "was prepared to show that Mr. and Mrs. Shaw evinced the most tender regard for the pupils of the school"! Happily the Judge did not agree with Mr. Sergeant Pell, for the defence—note the name! for surely here is the absolutely undeniable prototype of that oily old rascal, Solomon Pell of Pickwick fame;

one can just imagine Solomon undertaking the defence of a case like this.

The verdict was for the plaintiff, with damages £300, and another action brought against Shaw on 31 October by the father of a boy named Ocherby, who also lost his sight at the school, resulted in a similar verdict with the same amount of damages. As Shaw was said to have paid the eminent oculist, Sir W. Adams, a fee of 300 guineas to investigate the disease (though apparently this was only done after the poor little victims had been ruined for life), and would be liable to very heavy costs on these two actions, besides the £600 damages, it will be seen that the total cost would be considerable, but as Shaw obtained time to pay the damages, did pay them, and continued his school, it is evident that the punishment was not a sufficient deterrent either to him or to other practitioners of this infamous trade, and there was still a crying need for reform when Charles Dickens commenced his crusade against the evil. It is a curious thing that a few chapters in a work of fiction should be able to accomplish a reform that all the pomp and majesty of law was powerless to effect, but it really looks as though the Yorkshire Schools system might have lasted to this day, de-

spite actions such as the one just described, if Dickens had not awakened the public conscience with his "Nicholas Nickleby"; this is, of course, a great tribute to the wonderful power Dickens wielded in his pen, and probably no other author of the period could have gained the ear of the public like he did. One by one the hateful Yorkshire Schools closed their doors, and their owners slunk away into obscurity; they may not all have been as bad as Shaw or Squeers, but the system was a rotten one and not fit to be tolerated in a so-called Christian country.

Shaw was brought into public notice again under suspicion of being aimed at in Dickens' portrayal of Squeers, and we are told that he became an object of ridicule to most of his neighbours (though some of them would have it that he was rather an amiable and humane man in private life!), and this and the ruin that soon overtook his business through loss of pupils, broke his spirit and hastened his death; we can feel but little pity for him, though perhaps he is entitled to some, for from now to the end of time he is doubly damned, and must bear the sins not only of William Shaw, but also of Wackford Squeers of Dotheboys Hall.

CUMBERLAND CLARK.

FACSIMILE

Doughty Street
December 29th 1838.

My dear Mr. Hall.

I am exceedingly obliged to you for your kind note, and the interesting anecdote which you tell so well. I have laid it by in the end of the first number of Nicholby, and shall keep it there in confirmation of the truth of my little picture.

Depend upon it that the rascalities of those Yorkshire schoolmasters cannot easily be exaggerated, and that I have kept down the strong truth and shown as much comicality over it as I could, rather than

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an inky penknife, and so caused
his death. The country for miles
round was covered, when I was there,
with deep snow. There is an old
church near the school, and
the first grave-stone I stumbled on
that dreary winter afternoon was
placed above the grave of a boy,
eighteen long years old, who had

died - suddenly, the misanthrope said; I suppose his heart broke - the camel falls down "suddenly" when they heap the last load upon his back - died at that watched place. I think his ghost put smiles with my head; upon the spot.

FACSIMILE

I went down in an assumed name, taking a plausible letter to an old Yorkshire attorney from another attorney in town, telling him how a friend had been left a widow and wanted to place her boys at a Yorkshire school, in hopes of thereby the frohen compassion of her relations. The man of business gave me an introduction to one or two schools, but at night he came down to the Inn where I was stopping, and after much

hesitation and confusion – he was a lazy-headed flat-nosed red-faced old fellow – said with a degree of feeling one would not have seen him credit for, that the matter had been upon his mind all day – that they were sad places for mothers to send their orphan boys to – that he hoped I would not give up him as my adviser – but that she had better do anything with them – let them hold horses, run errands – fling them in any way upon the mercy of the world – rather than trust them there. This was an attorney, a well-fed man of business, and a Yorkshireman!

FACSIMILE

Mrs. Dickens and myself will be delighted to see the friend you speak of – unite in regards to yourself and Mr. Hall. and I throw myself single-handed upon your good nature, and beseech you to forgive me this long story – which you ought to do, as you have been the means of drawing it from me. Believe me, Dear Mrs Hall,

Very faithfully yours

Charles Dickens

Doughty Street

December 29th. 1838

My Dear Mrs. Hall.

I am exceedingly obliged to you for your kind note, and the interesting anecdote which you tell so well. I have laid it by in the MS. of the first number of Nickleby, & shall keep it there in confirmation of the truth of my little picture.

Depend upon it that the rascalities of those Yorkshire Schoolmasters *cannot* easily be exaggerated, and that I have kept down the strong truth and thrown as much comicality over it as I could, rather than disgust and weary the reader with its fouler aspects. The identical scoundrel you speak of, I saw—curiously enough. His name is Shaw; the action was tried (I believe) eight or ten years since, and if I am not much mistaken another action was brought against him by the parents of a miserable child, a cancer in whose head *he* opened with an inky penknife, and so caused his death. The country for miles round was covered, when I was there, with deep snow. There is an old

church near the school, and the first gravestone I stumbled on that dreary winter afternoon was placed above the grave of a boy, eighteen long years old, who had died suddenly, the inscription said; I suppose his heart broke—the Camel falls down "suddenly" when they heap the last load upon his back—died at that wretched place. I think his ghost put Smike into my head, upon the spot.

I went down in an assumed name, taking a plausible letter to an old Yorkshire attorney from another attorney in town, telling him how a friend had been left a widow and wanted to place her boys at a Yorkshire School, in hopes of thawing the frozen compassion of her relations. The man of business gave me an introduction to one or two schools, but at night he came down to the Inn where I was stopping, and after much hesitation and confusion—he was a large-headed flat-nosed red-faced old fellow—said with a degree of feeling one would not have given him credit for, that the matter had been upon his mind all day—that they were sad places for mothers to send their orphan boys too—that he hoped I would not give up him as my adviser—but that she had better do anything with them—let them hold horses, run errands—

fling them in any way upon the mercy of the World — rather than trust them there. This was an attorney, a well-fed man of business, and a rough Yorkshireman!

Mrs. Dickens and myself will be delighted to see the friend you speak of—we write in regards to yourself and Mr. Hall—and I throw myself single-handed upon your good nature, and beseech you to forgive me this long story—which you ought to do, as you have been the means of drawing it from me,

Believe me, Dear Mrs. Hall,

Very faithfully Yours,

CHARLES DICKENS.

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